



Discovery of Rosetta stone - July 15, 1799

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General Note



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The Rosetta stone is an Ancient Egyptian artifact. It is a large black stone, made of basalt, which is nearly 4 feet long, over 2 feet wide and 11 inches thick. Basalt is a dark colored, fine-grained volcanic rock the most abundant volcanic rock in the Earth's crust. The stone is a Ptolemaic era stele with carved text made up of three translations of a single passage: two in Egyptian language scripts (hieroglyphic and Demotic) and one in classical Greek. The Rosetta stone was discovered in Egypt by French soldiers on July 19, 1799. It was contributed greatly to the deciphering of the principles of hieroglyph writing in 1822 by the British scientist Thomas Young and the French scholar Jean-François Champollion. The text on the Rosetta stone was written by priests to honor the Egyptian pharaoh, and was a list of all the good things the pharaoh had done for the priests and people of Egypt. It was thus written in all three scripts so that everyone—namely priests, government officials, and rulers—would be able to understand it.

The Rosetta stone was forfeited to the English in 1801 under the terms of the Treaty of Alexandria. Following its arrival in England in 1801, the Rosetta stone was placed in The Society of Antiquaries, where casts were made and sent to the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Dublin and to scholars in France for incorporation in the *Description de l'Égypte* that was eventually published between 1809 and 1828. In June, 1802 the stone was placed in the British Museum, where it remains. The Society of Antiquaries issued full-size reproductions of the stone between 1802 and 1803.